

THE IMMIGRATION BILL

H. R. 10384

MESSAGE

FROM THE

President of the United States

TRANSMITTING

HIS VETO ON THE BILL (H. R. 10384) TO REGULATE
THE IMMIGRATION OF ALIENS TO, AND
THE RESIDENCE OF ALIENS IN,
THE UNITED STATES



JANUARY 30, 1917.—Ordered to be printed

WASHINGTON
GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE

1917

SV6505
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IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,

January 30, 1917.

Ordered, That the message of the President transmitting his veto on the bill H. R. 10384, the immigration bill, be printed as a House document for the use of the House.

CLARENCE A. CANNON,

Journal Clerk.

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VETO MESSAGE—H. R. 10384.

To the House of Representatives:

I very much regret to return this bill (H. R. 10384, "An act to regulate the immigration of aliens to, and the residence of aliens in, the United States") without my signature. In most of the provisions of the bill I should be very glad to concur, but I can not rid myself of the conviction that the literacy test constitutes a radical change in the policy of the Nation which is not justified in principle. It is not a test of character, of quality, or of personal fitness, but would operate in most cases merely as a penalty for lack of opportunity in the country from which the alien seeking admission came. The opportunity to gain an education is in many cases one of the chief opportunities sought by the immigrant in coming to the United States, and our experience in the past has not been that the illiterate immigrant is as such an undesirable immigrant. Tests of quality and of purpose can not be objected to on principle, but tests of opportunity surely may be.

Moreover, even if this test might be equitably insisted on, one of the exceptions proposed to its application involves a provision which might lead to very delicate and hazardous diplomatic situations. The bill exempts from the operation of the literacy test "all aliens who shall prove *to the satisfaction of the proper immigration officer or to the Secretary of Labor* that they are seeking admission to the United States to avoid religious persecution in the country of their last permanent residence, whether such persecution be evidenced by overt acts or by laws or governmental regulations that discriminate against the alien or the race to which he belongs because of his religious faith." Such a provision, so applied and administered, would oblige the officer concerned in effect to pass judgment upon the laws and practices of a foreign Government and declare that they did or did not constitute religious persecution. This would, to say the least, be a most invidious function for any administrative officer of this Government to perform, and it is not only possible but probable that very serious questions of international justice and comity would arise between this Government and the Government or Governments thus officially condemned should its exercise be attempted. I dare say that these consequences were not in the minds of the proponents of this provision but the provision separately and in itself renders it unwise for me to give my assent to this legislation in its present form.

WOODROW WILSON.

THE WHITE HOUSE, *January 29, 1917.*

